

Contact: Rick Haney (304) 623-5631

Email: Richard.haney@sba.gov

Internet: www.sba.gov/wv

The Sky is the Limit for West Virginia Small Business

BRIDGEPORT, W.Va. - From the ground to the moon.....there is no limiting FMW Composite Systems, Inc., a small veteran-owned firm located in Bridgeport, W.Va. Fresh on the heels of the successful delivery of a super lightweight carrier to the National Aeronautical and Space Agency (NASA) for use in transporting equipment on the space shuttle, the company has won a contract to supply the U.S. Marine Corps a liquid/fueling system.

The Ground Expedient Refueling System (GERS) is designed to transfer liquids from a storage/transport unit to military vehicle without pumps or motors. The system is operable using an external air compressor or an existing on-board air supply.

“Who would have believed ten years ago that a small West Virginia firm would be providing sophisticated products for NASA’s space shuttle and critical components for our military efforts,” said Congressman Alan B. Mollohan at a ceremony commemorating the signing of the multimillion dollar contract. “It bodes well for the future of not only FMW, but the entire West Virginia economy.”

FMW specializes in designing, developing and producing rubber, polymer and metal matrix composite products for defense, commercial and aerospace applications. They have ISO 9001 and AS9100 quality system certifications and provide a full range of manufacturing, assembly, inspection and material testing services.

Literally designed on the back of a table napkin by company president, Dale McBride, GERS is a rubber bladder storage system, which bridges the gap between a five-gallon fuel can and a large refueling truck.

“The concept for the current system happened at a luncheon I attended with now retired Marine Corps General Randy West about five years ago,” said McBride. “The military needed a safe, fast and more economical refueling system. After several attempts, the GERS system evolved.”

McBride, a former aero space engineer, lawyer and a coal industrial manufacturer, has spent the majority of his professional career developing skills in the acquisition arena through his business ventures.

McBride began developing his knowledge base in the rubber composite industry in 1985, as a result his acquisition of Mountaineer Tire. That venture evolved into FMW Rubber Products in 1993, which subsequently became FMW Composite Systems, Inc.

It was about this time that McBride turned to the U.S. Small Business Administration for financial assistance through the agency’s loan guaranty programs. He received two loans through local lending institutions, guaranteed by the SBA, which helped launch the expansion into composite systems.

“The SBA provided FMW assistance through its financing programs to help with our start-up; but equally important, SBA has been a part of our team in our expansion throughout the years,” states McBride. “The

assistance and support of SBA's West Virginia office has been instrumental in the success of FMW. We have also utilized SBA's SBIR and Certificate of Competency programs, the latter of which helped with the contract with the Marine Corps."

The 7(a) Program is SBA's primary lending program. It provides loan guarantees for small businesses unable to secure financing on reasonable terms through normal lending channels. It operates through private-sector lenders who provide loans which are, in turn, guaranteed by the SBA.

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program encourages small businesses to explore their technological potential by reserving a specific percentage of federal R&D funds for small businesses. The program serves to fund the critical startup and development stages for a technology and encourages commercialization of the technology, product or service.

The Certificate of Competency (COC) program provides a small business the means to appeal a contracting officer's determination that it is unable to fulfill the requirements of a specific government contract on which it is the apparent low bidder. It helps ensure small businesses, especially those new to federal contracting, are given a fair opportunity to compete for and receive government contracts.

"It has been a privilege to work with Dale McBride and Jennifer Morton as they built FMW," said Judy McCauley, director of SBA's West Virginia District Office. "The market they created will sustain a steady increase in high paying jobs in North Central West Virginia for years to come. FMW and small businesses like it are the true future of West Virginia. I am pleased that the agency contributed to the success of FMW, and also look forward to being a part of their future success."

McBride added, "We have enjoyed steady progress and growth over the past four years and, excluding the GERS contract, have had more than \$20 million in contracts awarded during that time."

McBride recently used the SBA's 504-loan program to acquire equipment as part of a \$3.6 million dollar project. "We have grown from 18 to 48 employees as a result of the recent expansion," states McBride. "SBA's programs have led to new opportunities for FMW and helped create jobs for West Virginians."

The 504-CDC program is a long-term financing tool for economic development within a community. The program provides businesses with long-term, fixed-rate financing for major fixed assets, such as land and buildings.

A complete 504 project includes a loan secured with a senior lien from a private-sector lender covering up to 50 percent of a project, a loan secured with a junior lien from the CDC (backed by a 100 percent SBA-guaranteed debenture) covering up to 40 percent of the cost, and a contribution of at least 10 percent equity from the small business owner.

"The assistance we've received from the SBA has allowed us to produce a wide variety of products for both the United States and international military," said McBride. "We are also in position to serve as prime contractor on government and commercial contracts and better able to accomplish our goal of providing the military the tools they need in order to accomplish its mission."

The next time a story about the United State's war on terrorism or the space program is in the news, remember, there is a small West Virginia company sitting quietly behind the scenes with a big hand in their success.

For more information on the SBA and the programs and services available to assist small businesses, contact the West Virginia District Office at 1-800-767-8052 ext. 8, by email at wvinfo@sba.gov or visit their web site at www.sba.gov/wv.